

The Civil War -- Part 2

By Ray Davis

The vast majority in Caldwell county was pro-Union. In many neighboring counties, families had been settled for several generations and they had forgotten the hardships suffered and the price paid for their homes. But here, the people had worked long and hard for what they had, and they were not going to risk losing it. Even most of the Democrats and Southerners in this area were against secession. The early settlers resisted any intrusions on their freedom, true: they were very independent people. But they did not like the idea of starting a war against a government which had served them well, all in all, and certainly done nothing to merit a revolution. In the same way, the majority of the people of Caldwell county was against the abolition of slavery. Many here were Southerners and slave-owners; most of them didn't see anything particularly wrong with slavery — certainly not enough to justify all the trouble that its abolition would produce.

In short, the majority in Caldwell county was both pro-union and anti-abolition, with a strong minority of secessionists and a very small (and much hated) minority of abolitionists. This situation was fairly typical of Missouri as a whole, and was, as a matter of fact, almost exactly the sort that President Lincoln was thinking of when he formulated his Border state strategy. During the early years of the war, this strategy played an important part, and Lincoln carefully went over every policy that might disturb it. His strategy was simply to emphasize the illegality of secession and to steadfastly deny that slavery had anything to do with the war.

Lincoln's gamble was that by playing on the deep feeling in the border states for a unified country, and by ignoring the dangerous issue of slavery for as long as possible, he could keep the border states in the Union. And Caldwell county was one of the many places where his gamble paid off.

But the secessionists here (as throughout Missouri) were a very vocal minority. For example, the first newspaper in Caldwell County, the *Beacon*, established at Kingston in late 1860, was formed chiefly to serve as an outlet for secessionist propaganda. The editor was Wilbur F. Boggs (surely some relation to the Boggs who played such a notable role in the Mormon war), and he filled his paper with editorials denouncing the "negro-loving autocrat" and "Black Republican military tyrant" and urging "men who

coming, and the Caldwell Light Infantry and other secessionists left the county with astonishing speed. As it turned out, the rumor had been wrong. But that was as good a time as any to leave: the county was under complete control of the Unionists anyway.

After leaving Caldwell, the Light Infantry went to Lexington, where they were mustered into General Price's Missouri State Guards. When their six-month term in the State Guards was up, virtually all of the Caldwell company re-enlisted into the Confederate service. There, again under the command of General Price, they fought in several battles east of the Mississippi, including Vicksburg.

There were two companies formed of Union Home Guards — one of infantry, the other of calvary. Both of them were among the first Union companies in northwest Missouri. In the fall of 1861, two more companies made up of men from Caldwell county were formed, to serve in a battalion of Union militia. In the spring of 1861, many Caldwell men joined the 6th regiment of calvary, again, part of the state militia. And in July, 1862, most of the Unionists that were left went into the enrolled militia.

Davis township donated many more to the Union troops than the secessionist Light Infantry. The township was strongly pro-union, from the "uncompromisingly" Unionist Moads (James's father, Thomas Moad, was an abolitionist) to the Southern, Democratic, slave-owning Osters.

In fact, all the families that have been mentioned so far worked for the Union. Allen Rathbun, for instance, was a union man until his death in 1862. Sandford Owen, now a young man, was a Democrat but supported the Union, and he was a member of the Enrolled Militia. As had already been mentioned, the Osters were slave-owners. Yet Conrad Oster and four of his sons served in the Union army during the war. Joshua Orem, on the other hand, was very anti-Democrat. He had a lieutenant's commission in the Enrolled Militia.

Eppa Holder was a staunch Union man. His son, William A. Holder, was a Democrat, but was another member of the Enrolled Militia. Despite his military duties, William managed to find time in 1863 to marry Samuel Davis's daughter Paulina.

And what of the Davises themselves? Almost all of the family were strongly pro-Union. Several of Dennis Davis's grandchildren fought on the Union side. George W. Davis (John T.'s son), for instance, was one of the first from the township to take part in the war. He

too old to fight. And so they were the ones that suffered.

Any Confederate soldier who became wounded and returned home was walking into a death sentence. Fathers of Confederate soldiers, and obstinate old men who persisted in defending the South, both were likely to be killed by Union troops. 68 and 70-year old men were shot on the spot. And very often, after the men were killed, the victorious Union troops would burn the secessionist's house to the ground, leaving the "criminal" widow homeless. In the later years of the war, this sort of treatment was sometimes given to people who were just suspected because they were Democrat, or came from the South (perhaps they had run out of real secessionists to torment). By 1863, anyone who was against the abolition of slavery came under suspicion as the majority in the county became anti-slavery. Undoubtedly, some innocent people were killed just because they had continued to hold a view that had been common just two years before.

It was under these circumstances that the oldest member of the Davises, Dennis Davis, created some concern among his family. Dennis had come from the South, first of all. Secondly, he tended to sympathize with the South in the Civil War. Thirdly, he tended to explain his views in public at great length. So, though no cases of murder by Unionists occurred in Davis township in the war, it was probably only due to the speediness of Dennis's family in rescuing the old man.

So, Davis Township had been very fortunate in the war compared with most other areas in Caldwell county and elsewhere. The war had not really harmed anything thus far in the township, and the troops sent out mostly stayed in Missouri, fighting in a few bloody but still small battles. But the area's luck was not to hold out. In 1864, the people of Davis township, both at home and in the military, were going to have enough excitement to make up for any moments of peace they had before. X—

After The War

By Ray Davis

In the final months of the Civil War, Caldwell county volunteers finally got their chance to fight in the Federal Union army, as opposed to the state militia, when the 44th Missouri Infantry was formed. Many of the men whose terms in the militia were up joined the 44th, including George W. Davis.

The 44th played an important part in the battle of Franklin, Tenn., where in two days the 44th lost, in dead, wounded and missing, 300 men. It also fought in the battle of Nashville, marching sixty miles in the December ice and snow with two-thirds of the regiment barefooted. But as spring arrived, it became obvious that the war was drawing to a close. After marching through the South that summer with nothing "to do but protect Rebel property and fight Bushwhackers," the 44th was mustered out of service August 15, 1865.

The 44th left its impact on Caldwell. Most of its members had rarely been far from home before, and the extensive travelling of the war opened their eyes to the possibility of living somewhere else. In a letter to John T. Davis's son, Dennis, Josiah Owen, writing from Tuskegee, Alabama, tells of visiting cities from Washington, D.C., and Baltimore to Pittsburg and Cincinnati to Vicksburg and New Orleans. Such an experience had an important effect on the youth of the time. As Josiah put it: "I have traveled over twelve states since I left home and I am not quite as bashful as I used to be." The real casualties to Caldwell county's population were not those killed or wounded but those who had caught a glimpse of a world outside their home farms.

But, just as many people left in the years after the war, so many came to Caldwell. Indeed, John and Henry Eichler both came to the area during the war, John in 1862, Henry in 1864. The brothers had both been born in Germany in a family of eight children. John was 20 when he emigrated to America in 1849. Henry came to the U.S. in 1855 at the age of 17. Both of them were to be important to the area.

In 1866, David C. Feese arrived from Illinois, after seeing much active service in the war, including the battles of Franklin and Nashville. He soon became a success as a farmer, stock-raiser, carpenter, justice of the peace, and minister. And Mr. Feese still found time to have the customary large family: eight children.

In 1865, Jacob F. Phillips came to the area, after being a prisoner of the Confederates from August 1861 to December 1864.

Josiah M. Loomis came in 1868. He was born in Maine, but ran away from home at thirteen to Boston, then to New York, where he became an actor. He then joined forces with P. T. Barnum for ten years, during which time he married. He and his wife then formed their own travelling acting company. Finally he arrived at Davis township where he became a successful farmer--of wine grapes, and bought 600 acres.

Also in 1868, Marion H. Motsinger (from Indiana; he also fought in the Franklin and Nashville battles) and Tobias R. Shiner (from Iowa) arrived.

In 1869, Daniel Braymer bought his first land here--440 acres. Raised in New York state, Braymer began traveling at the age of 23, spending time and buying land in Georgia, Tennessee, Kentucky, Mexico, New Mexico, and Kansas. Braymer soon became the most successful businessman in the area. He finally owned more than two thousand acres in northwest Missouri, 800 acres in Oklahoma, farms in Washington and South Dakota, and part of a ranch in New Mexico. Moreover, he managed to slowly turn his huge land holdings into beautiful, fertile, and highly profitable farms, as well as raise stock. Before long, Daniel Braymer had control over more interests than anyone else in the area, and he was shortly to use his power.

For the moment, though, the Davis family was still quite influential. In 1869, Davis township was officially organized. In early 1871, Samuel D. Davis laid out a village, to be named Black Oak. Black Oak became a reality in 1872, when Joseph Owens established a general store there, which he eventually sold to Dennis Davis. The year after John B. Luellen came to Missouri (after living in California, Idaho Territory, and Illinois), 1873, he bought the store and built up a large trade. In 1880, Black Oak was incorporated as a village.

By 1886, Black Oak had a population of 125. It had half-a-dozen stores and shops, and a hotel kept by the old pioneer Charley Ross, a veteran of both the Mormon and Civil Wars.

The area of Davis township might have continued in this way, as a quiet, slowly-growing, small collection of farmers. But the brilliant machinations of Daniel Braymer were about to bring an end to the region's long quiet period.

*Great article
about Black Oak*